

John Carter Brown.

Sept 1892

Unpublished to the public.
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B R I E F
C O N S I D E R A T I O N S
O N
S L A V E R Y,
A N D T H E
E X P E D I E N C Y · O F I T S A B O L I T I O N .

W I T H S O M E

H I N T S on the M E A N S whereby it may be
gradually effected.

Recommended to the serious Attention of ALL, and
especially of those entrusted with the Powers of
LEGISLATION.

But yet, admit the Sire his Right foregoes,
Can he his Childrens sep'rate Claim dispose?
Whate'er the Parent gave; whate'er he give;
They who have Right to Life, have Right to live;
And Spight of Man's Consent, or Man's Decree,
A Right to Life, is Right to Liberty.

Anon: Epistle to Lord CORNBURY.

B U R L I N G T O N :

Printed and Sold by ISAAC COLLINS,
M.DCC.LXXIII.

SPJCB

B R I E F

C O N S I D E R A T I O N S

O N

S L A V E R Y, &c.

TH E religious and moral Obligations we are under in a private capacity, to do our utmost to promote the true interests of mankind, encrease with our powers and opportunities of action. Hence arises the importance of that trust, which the wisdom of government has reposed in legislatures ; in discharging which, having the will, they have also the power of promoting those interests in the most effectual manner. The object therefore, which I now take the liberty of recommending to their attention, has an indisputable claim to it ; not only from its importance as relating to the community, but from a consideration which must give it great additional weight with every generous mind—the incapacity of those on whose behalf it is solicited, to plead their own cause. It is the case of the enslaved Africans—a case which tho’ familiarized to us by custom, is yet in all its parts so replete with affecting circumstances, that perhaps it has not its parallel in the history of any period of time ; and attended with the particular aggravation, of being acted under a government, remarkable above all others for the excellence of its constitution, and the equity of its laws. How it has happened that a nation, which has so eminently distinguished itself in asserting the common rights of mankind, and which has so often generously interposed its power for the relief
of

of its oppressed neighbours, should tolerate so grievous an infringement of liberty in its own dominions, is difficult to comprehend. But my intention is not to expatiate on the inconsistency of these generous exertions of its power, with the toleration of the African slave-trade. I hope it may be attributed to the multiplicity and weight of other engagements, which have so much engrossed the attention of government, that the iniquitous nature of this traffick has not been adverted to ; for certainly an acquaintance with it, could only be necessary for its suppression. But without a further investigation of the *cause*, it is more to my present purpose, to confine myself to such considerations, as being duly attended to, may assist the *cure* of this malignant disorder in the body politick. With this view, I shall briefly consider its inconsistency with the divine, as well as the social law ; its impolicy and evil tendency ; and then endeavour to point out the most probable means by which the evil may be remedied.

IT cannot be denied that Slavery was allowed to the Israelites by the Mosaic law, under certain circumstances and restrictions ; yet it differed from this of the Africans in several important particulars. Their bondmen and bondwomen enjoyed many privileges ; and in the year of Jubilee, liberty was proclaimed unto all the inhabitants of the land. On the contrary, a large part of our poor African slaves, have no ground to expect the most distant admission to liberty, for either themselves, or their latest posterity. But even though we may conceive Slavery to be reconcilable to the precepts given under that dispensation ; yet to every unprejudiced mind, it must appear totally repugnant to the spirit and design of the gospel, the import of which was announced to the world, in a manner awfully expressive of its superior excellence, proclaiming

proclaiming “Glory to God in the highest; peace
 “on earth; and good will to men.” These glorious
 purposes, our blessed Saviour, when personally among
 men, inculcated by his example and doctrines; and,
 to give these greater efficacy, finally sealed them with
 his blood. Various were the precepts he delivered,
 but those relating to our social duties, are all com-
 prized in that excellent command, “Therefore
 “whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye
 “even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.”
 Mat. 7. 12. St. Paul’s opinion of those concerned in
 the practice now under consideration, appears by his
 enumerating them among a number of atrocious
 offenders for whom the law was made, viz. “Mur-
 “derers of fathers; murderers of mothers; man-
 “slayers; whoremongers; them that defile them-
 “selves with mankind; menstealers,” &c.

THAT it is also an offence against the social law,
 cannot be contradicted; for this law is founded on the
 necessity of mutual security, and a reciprocation of
 benefits; and by the light of our natural reason, we
 cannot find a rule better adapted to promote these
 ends, than that I have quoted from the vii. of Mat-
 thew; to which both Christians and Pagans have
 joined in giving the distinguishing appellation of *the*
golden rule. The celebrated Montesquieu and many others
 who have made the rights of mankind their particular
 study, assert that men universally have an inherent title
 to Liberty; and the author I have named, with no
 less strength than vivacity of reasoning, has refuted those
 ridiculous arguments, which interested men have been
 obliged to adduce, in support of a pretended opinion,
 that the colour or unpolished manners of the Africans,
 can operate against their claim to this first of temporal
 enjoyments.

IN these northern provinces there are not very many, who are immediately concerned in the trade to Africa for Slaves ; nor is the number of these oppressed people very considerable, when compared with that of many other colonies. Hence some, though admitting the injustice of the slave trade in general, may yet be unwilling to view it as a matter sufficiently important for the extraordinary interposition of a legislature ; being perhaps insensibly biased by interest, the prevalence of custom, or the example of less enlightened times ; thus lessening the force of those objections which calm reflection had suggested. I would submit to the consideration of such, the complicated distress these poor creatures suffer, in being forceably torn from that portion of happiness, which the allwise Creator allotted to them in their native state ; to sustain for life, a bondage which, in our southern colonies and islands, is more cruel and oppressive than the most of us in the northern colonies have had an opportunity of forming any idea of. Add to this, the bloody wars occasioned by this infernal trade—the great proportion of them who die on the passage to, and in what is called the *seasoning* in America ; and can we then hesitate a moment, in determining on the expediency of contributing whatever lies in our power to discourage it. It is true some of our forefathers, and some of the present generation, may have been, and yet are in the practice of buying and selling slaves. The reasons against it, but a few years ago, were not so well understood as they now are. The opportunities of information are become more frequent ; and the usage of them in general among us, has been less likely to excite an inquiry into the nature of the trade, and our title to their services. The practice of ages cannot sanctify error ; but the progress of reformation has, in all, been gradual. I doubt not there are now
many

many men in England, whose integrity we should revere, but who, for want of proper information or attention to the subject, do yet admit the right of the British parliament to tax the colonies ; but we are not, for that reason obliged to admit it. Having thus briefly considered the slave-trade as contradictory to the divine and social law, it is needless to urge the impropriety of any, and especially a free people being in anywise concerned in it. I shall therefore proceed to consider the particular inconveniences attending it, with respect to the community.

THAT the trade is attended with many inconveniences of an evil and impolitic tendency, has been lately clearly set forth by several writers. It will be sufficient for me to enumerate a few of them. Every thing that debases the mind, unfits it for society ; and this is a distinguishing characteristick of Slavery, which naturally suppresses every generous expansion of the mind. Montesquieu, in his spirit of laws saith, “ That nothing
 “ more assimilates a man to a beast, than living among
 “ freemen, himself a slave : such people as these are
 “ the natural enemies of society ; and their number
 “ must always be dangerous.” Therefore the having slaves in our families or neighbourhood, must have a pernicious effect on the principles and morals of our young people and servants. May we not fear that religion and morality, industry and publick spirit, have nearly declined in proportion as it has been encouraged ?——The riches of a free state consists in the number of members, who enjoying its privileges and blessings, are thereby interested in its preservation and advancement. Every slave among us occupies the room of a free person, and not only lessens the riches of the state by diminishing the number of its friends, but adds one to that of its internal enemies ; for such every one
 must

must be accounted, who can derive no hope from its prosperity, and may possibly be benefited by its ruin.* While on the other hand, every servant on the expiration of a limited servitude, setting out with the animating hope of acquiring an independence in the community, and of enjoying the blessings of life, and the protection of the laws, heartily unites in promoting the prosperity of his country ; and, as that hope is answered with success, becomes more and more deeply interested in its safety : the beneficial effects of this on our lands and produce, are very extensive, and too obvious to need a recital.—In the present contest between Great-Britain and her colonies, it seems particularly necessary on our parts to convince her, that our opposition to her claims is not merely from selfish motives—not only made because they happen to affect *our* particular interests ; but from a disinterested generous love to liberty, founded on principle—on publick virtue, and a conviction that it is the unalienable right of man. But how can she believe this, when, so loudly complaining of her attacks on our political liberty, all the colonies tolerate, and many of them greatly encourage this violent invasion of natural liberty ; subjecting the Africans not only to the deprivation of all property, but even to the most abject state of perpetual personal slavery ? If we suppose the divine blessing is necessary to ensure us success in asserting our rights ; of how much consequence is it, that we should practise the part enjoined by the divine command, “ Whatsoever ye would that men “ should do to you, do ye even so to them ?” If power only must determine our right, how little have we to expect ? On the other hand, were we armed with conscious innocence, and supported by the justice of
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* Admitting this, what danger must attend our southern colonies, in some of which, the proportion of slaves to freemen is greater than as twelve to one ?

our cause; what have we to fear? With what confidence might we urge our claims? But as a late writer on this subject observes, “ If we need the help of the
 “ negroes ; so does Great-Britain need our help to pay
 “ off their national debt. If we desire to grow rich,
 “ and rest at ease by their toils and labours ; so does
 “ Great-Britain desire the same at our expence. So
 “ that while we persist in this practice of enslaving the
 “ Africans, our mouths ought to be entirely shut, as to
 “ any duties and taxes which Great-Britain may see
 “ cause to lay upon us. Otherwise I see not, but that
 “ out of our own mouths, or by our own practice, we
 “ may be justly condemned.”

HAVING given my sentiments on a trade and practice, which, to use the words of the author of *An essay in vindication of the continental colonies of America*, “ Policy rejects ; justice condemns ; and piety dissuades ;” I shall, from the same respectable author, add, “ Shall
 “ Americans persist in a conduct which cannot be
 “ justified ; or persevere in oppression, from which their
 “ hearts must recoil ? If the barbarous Africans shall
 “ continue to enslave each other ; let the dæmon slavery remain among them, that their crime may include its punishment. Let not Christians, by administering to their wickedness, confess their religion
 “ to be a useless refinement, their profession vain, and
 “ themselves as inhuman as the savages they detest.”

I CANNOT believe there are any in the christian faith, who have attentively, and dispassionately considered the subject, but will adopt the opinion, that Slavery, in any case, cannot be justified—that, as it is conducted in the African trade, it is a most cruel, tyrannical and violent invasion of the sacred rights of mankind ; and highly offensive to Almighty God—that it is impolitick in its
 nature

nature—that the practice of buying and selling slaves among ourselves is an evident encouragement of the trade; and that the encouragement of it, by any means, is inconsistent with our civil and religious interests. If we thus believe, it is certainly our indispensable duty in every station, publick or private, to exert ourselves for its suppression, whatever difficulties may be apprehended to attend its final accomplishment. The prejudices of custom are strong—those imbibed from interest, yet stronger. But in such a cause, we may be assured the blessing of Omnipotence will attend our endeavors, and in due time crown them with success; not within our own limits only; but our example will most probably have a happy influence on the conduct of others more remote. It lies in our power, in some measure, to atone for the wrongs our ancestors or ourselves have inadvertently imposed on these oppressed people in time past.

Is not then the first and most important step, absolutely to prohibit any future importations into these colonies. If by royal instructions, our governors are prevented the exercise of their own judgments; provincial addresses to the crown, would be likely to remove the difficulty. The sense of the people, conveyed by their representatives to the royal ear, on so interesting a subject, must prevail, with a prince whose virtues have endeared him to his people, although it should be opposed by men, comparatively few in number; whose avarice may continue to render them insensible to the common feelings of humanity, and whose God is gain. If we cannot obtain a *total* prohibition of the importation, we shall certainly be indulged in obtaining it for the colonies which petition for it. Even should we fail here, the conscious satisfaction of having done our duty, will be a reward sufficient for the labour.

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WITH respect to the slaves already among us, the case is more difficult, and will consequently occasion a diversity of sentiments on the proper means of effecting their enlargement. The first question is, What does justice require? This being determined, the honest mind will endeavour to practise it. There are many of this character, who, in pursuing the inquiry, have inclined to an opinion, that some of these unhappy people are unfit for liberty; and that their manumission would be attended with ruin to themselves. Such a state of depravity is not impossible, and nothing so likely to occasion it, as a long continuance in the situation they have been in. I wish there may not be many instances of this kind. Where it happens to be the case, and the possessor, after carefully divesting himself of any sinister bias, can justify a detention on this motive, I shall not controvert his right to exercise his judgment. There are also many, who not being yet sufficiently acquainted with the subject, to see the iniquity of the practice, do not apprehend the necessity of releasing their slaves. As these would be inclined to oppose, and those I have before mentioned, for other reasons, may be rather averse to a general and indiscriminate manumission; we may perhaps infer the expediency of postponing that desirable work to a period more favourable to our wishes. In reformatations of all kinds, where conviction precedes conversion, the effect is most permanent. But no objections occur to me, to the framing such laws, as will leave people at liberty to emancipate their slaves under certain restrictions.

As the laws stand at present in several of our northern governments, the act of manumission is clogged with difficulties that almost amount to a prohibition. An amendment is therefore necessary; and may be effected with advantage to the community. We may suppose
all

all the laws alluded to, are intended to secure the publick from being chargeable with any expence, in case the manumifed slave should by age, sickness, or other disability, become incapable of supporting himself: and a provision of this nature seems highly reasonable in certain cases. If, for instance, a slave is become aged and infirm in my service, it is unreasonable I should have it in my power, by manumission to deny him a support from my estate, to which perhaps his labour had contributed. But if, on the other hand, I have received no other benefit from his labour, than what was a proper compensation for the instruction I have given him, and the publick afterwards receives that benefit, it is then as reasonable, that the publick should be chargeable with any expence, occasioned by such disability. This seems to be the general principle on which our laws relating to *paupers* are formed; and I see no inconvenience in adopting it in the case now under consideration.

ADMITTING then, that if a slave is set at liberty at the age of twenty-one years, the publick afterwards receives all the benefit of his labour, it will follow that I may set him free at that age, clear of any charge or incumbrance on my estate. If I detain him longer, and then give him his liberty, the same reasoning supposes, that if the publick is afterwards liable to support him, in case of disability, I must pay the publick a certain sum of money proportionable to the time of such detention exceeding twenty-one years. No general rule can be exactly adapted to all cases. But I believe a law formed on these principles, would not only greatly tend to the relief of individuals, but remove some objections, to which I apprehend the present laws of several provinces are liable; particularly those which permit manumission on the master's enter-
ing

ing security for the payment of a certain sum, in case the slave should be disabled from maintaining himself. Now as this depends on a distant contingency, an alteration in the circumstances of the master and his sureties, (if any are required) may effectually disable him or them from making good their engagements. Whereas in the mode I propose, the money due on every manumission which requires it, being paid to a proper officer, remains secure with the publick. And if the slave on whose account it was paid, should never want any assistance, the fund allotted for the purpose will be so much the richer ; which is a considerable advantage in its favour.

SOME may think it necessary that no manumission should legally operate in all circumstances, beyond a certain age. The difficulty which would generally occur in determining the age of a negro, might be removed by enabling a magistrate to convene three or five men, who, or a majority of them, after hearing such evidence as could be adduced, and judging from appearances, should declare their judgment of his or her age. These, with many other particular considerations, will doubtless be properly attended to, whenever a matter of this consequence, comes under the immediate notice of a legislature. Some difficulty may attend ascertaining with precision the sums which will be necessary to pay, at the respective ages of manumission, to secure the publick from any unjust burden. It is a matter that requires judgment, and a particular kind of calculation with which I am but little acquainted. But as it may further explain what I have suggested ; I will venture a few more hints on the subject.

I understand that on emancipating a slave in Pennsylvania, the law requires security should be entered
for

for 30*l.* without any regard to age, or any other circumstances ; and that if the person so emancipated, should afterwards require assistance, any expence exceeding that sum, is paid by the township to which he or she may belong. Although this mode is liable to some exceptions, for reasons before given, I have never heard of any burden, arising therefrom, occasioning any uneasiness among the people of that province. Hence we may infer that the sum of 30*l.* has been generally found sufficient for the purpose. By the Breslau bills of mortality, it is found that the chances are equal, that a man of fifty years of age will live seventeen years. Let us consider what inconveniences might arise, if 20*l.* was paid on the manumission of a slave of that age, who afterwards lived seventeen years, in the first ten of which, we will suppose he could support himself by his labour ; and that in the remaining seven he required assistance, the expence whereof amounted to 30*l.* which, as before-mentioned, experience has found to be sufficient. Now 20*l.* put to interest (or applied to the other uses of the fund, which is the same thing) for ten years, at six per centum per annum, amounts to 32*l.* which leaves a balance in favour of the publick of 2*l.* besides the interest still arising on the decreasing principle, after the first ten years, and the benefit of his labour ; which would further increase that balance. If this calculation is just, (and if it is erroneous, I think the error is in favour of the publick) it will be a publick advantage to permit manumission on these terms ; and if it takes place at forty, a much less sum will answer the purpose.; and so in a decreasing proportion to the age of twenty-one years, when, as has been before shewn, nothing can be justly expected. Now we find that if, on the manumission of a slave between the years of twenty-one and fifty, fourteen shillings is paid to the publick

publick for every year his or her age exceeds twenty-one, it will bear a very near proportion to 20*l.* paid on a manumission at fifty, as above stated. I may be mistaken in the method I have taken to determine the sufficiency of that sum ; but I am so confident that the community would feel no inconvenience from adopting it, that, had I a sufficient estate to authorize the proposal, I should not fear deriving a considerable advantage from undertaking to support all the negroes so manumitted, who required assistance, with the monies so paid ; exclusive of the benefit accruing to the community from their labour, in which I should be only interested as an individual.

THUS I have stated, and proposed a method for settling the account, as it stands, on a manumission, with the publick. There are many who, cheerfully complying with these terms, would also remember that in some cases, there is another account depending between them and their slaves : and any encouragement or assistance they may suppose it their duty to give them in consideration of past services, will still lessen the risque of their ever becoming chargeable to the publick.

To conclude——the object I have proposed, has an undoubted claim to the most serious consideration of people of all ranks, and of every denomination ; for justice is confessedly alike obligatory on all. If to relieve the person of a single debtor from a temporary imprisonment, has repeatedly been admitted as a sufficient call for the interposition of a legislature——what is not due to the prosecution of the means of preventing the miseries inseparably attendant on, and the cruelties and deplorable sufferings too often annexed to, a state of perpetual slavery ; in which many thousands of our fellow-creatures are, and may be unjustly detained ?

Let

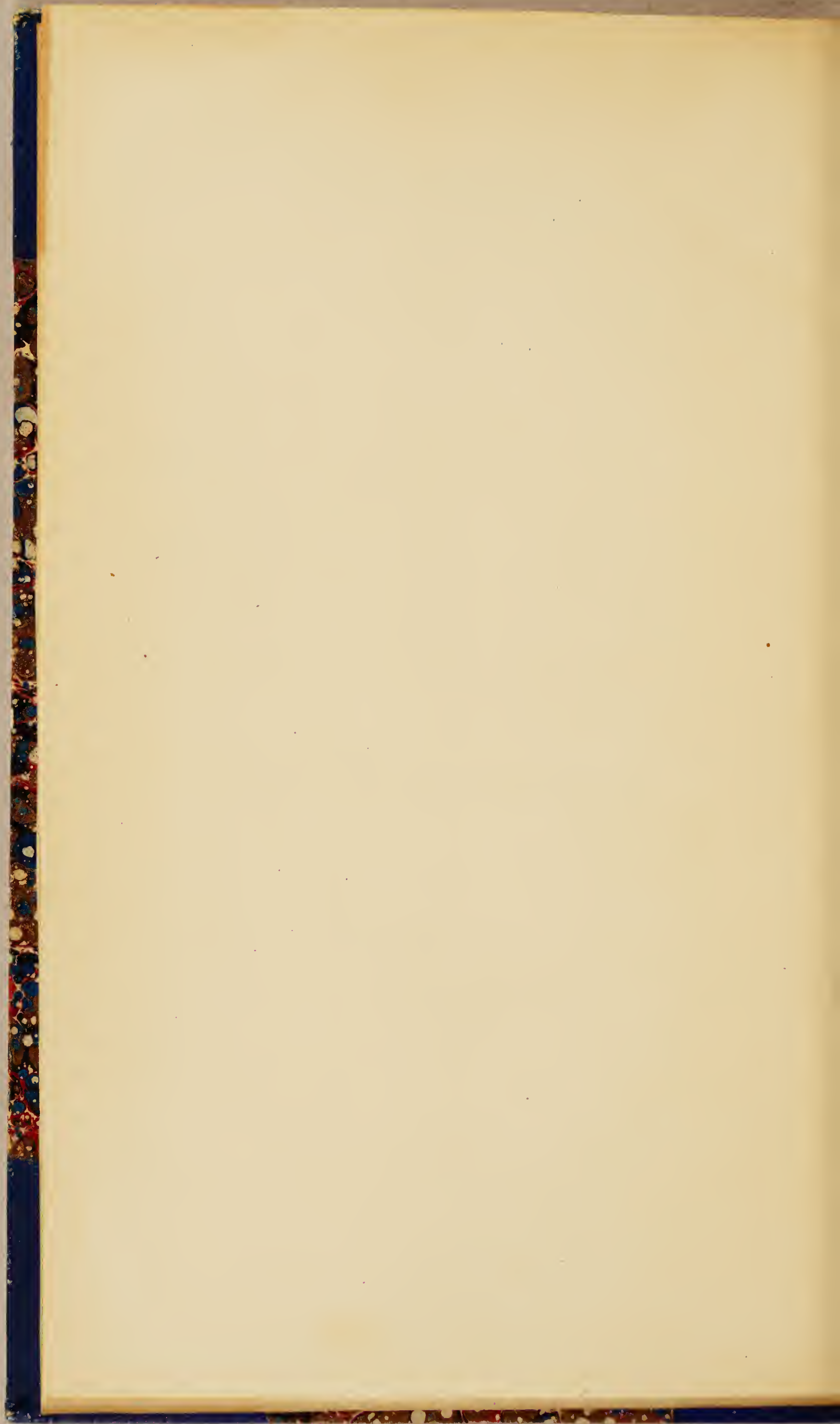
Let us reconcile our practice to our avowed principles. Let not our professions of an inviolable attachment to liberty, of late so frequently echoed from one end of the continent to the other, be contradicted by a practice as unjust as it is impolitick. Doctor Young is very severe where he says

“The world’s all title page, there’s no contents.”

Let our conduct shew our title to an exception. Let us therefore immediately consider, and adopt the most prudent measures for relieving those oppressed people ; and of enemies make them friends and useful members of society, by conferring on them such privileges as will interest them in the general welfare.

BEING sensible of my deficiency, I should have been pleased, had the few hints I have presumed to obtrude on the publick, employed a pen more equal to the importance of my subject. Conscious, however, of my motive in giving them, I flatter myself they will meet from the candid, the reception which is due to a good intention. As a wellwisher to the religious and civil interests of my country, I am willing to contribute my mite towards the removal of an evil, which I believe to be dangerous to both : and if any thoughts I have meant to express, have the least tendency to effect it ; I shall be indifferent whatever opinion is formed of the dress they appear in.





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